

A composition which when topically applied to the skin of a mammal reduces trans-epidermal water-loss and provides an improved epidermal barrier contains an aqueous dispersion of at least two lipids, preferably at least three lipids, in a non-crystalline phase lamellar array, preferably bilayer membranes in the form of liposomes. These lipids adopt a crystalline lamellar phase upon application to mammalian skin which resist washing with mild detergents and water. The composition can be formulated as a pharmaceutical preparation, and can be used in a method of recovering or otherwise improving a mammalian skin permeability barrier by administering the composition to the skin or hair and allowing the composition to dry. The dried composition adopts a crystalline lamellar phase after said administering to the skin. The composition thus provides a permeability barrier in cases where the natural barrier has been depleted, damaged or requires improvement. This barrier resists removal by detergent, solvent, or mechanical means over an extended period of time.